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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

Editorial Comment 2

Interpretation of School Social Work to the Community
Mrs. Alfred M. Wilson 3-10

Interpretation of School Social Work to Other School Personnel
Opal Boston 11-19

A Plan for the Prevention of Reading Difficulties
John A. Thomson 20-26

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Interpretation of School Social Work to school and community groups is an essential part of our service. The two papers given at the National Conference, April, 1950, at Atlantic City suggest important areas of interpretation and ways of reaching vital school and community groups. At a time when all social work services are turning attention to the imperative need for effective interpretation, these papers are timely and offer helpful material.

Mr. Thomson's article describes an interesting school experiment in which reading instruction is delayed by use of a Junior-Primary group. With the practical demonstration that benefits do result from such an experiment, the reading readiness principle is given new impetus.

INTERPRETATION OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK TO THE COMMUNITY*

MRS. ALFRED M. WILSON, Minneapolis, Minnesota
Member of Board of Directors of the
National Association of School Social Workers

"Do you know what a School Social Worker is?" That is the question I have asked many people in my community. The answer, for the most part, has been: "No, I have never heard of them."

Once I have raised the question, "Do you know what a School Social Worker is?", I am glad to say that people are interested and curious. Many times I have found myself talking at length on what work you do —and especially to people who have children and realize what a personal and important role it may play in their lives.

I would like to tell you a little about the City of Minneapolis. When I arrived there from New York nine years ago, one of my strongest impressions of the city was the tremendous sense of social responsibility that citizens have. I had hardly settled myself and my five children before I was asked to be a member of a hospital board, a member of a private agency board (Family Welfare), and received an invitation to become a member of the Women's Club, and several other propositions—such as working for Mr. Stassen—all of whose energies and efforts were directed toward social welfare and showed a great social consciousness.

During the war there was a tremendous emphasis on, and awareness of, social workers in many capacities, such as in the Red Cross Home Service, child guidance clinics, mental hygiene, et cetera. Our School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota was enlarged and revised to meet standards of the best schools of Social Work in the country. But not one word did I ever hear or know about School Social Workers or Visiting Teachers, whichever you wish to call them. I didn't know they existed or what they did. But it was not long before I was to be enlightened when Alma Laabs walked into my life and opened up a totally new and interesting aspect in my experience in public education and social work. (She also opened up, I may add, a good, hard job for me.) It greatly enriched my life but almost left me without a home or husband.

I don't know whether you all have heard of the beginning and

* Paper delivered at the National Conference of Social Work, Atlantic City, April, 1950.

formation of the Executive Office of the National Association of School Social Workers. I would like to tell you briefly about this if only to show you what can be done when you people inspire the interest of us lay people and urge and guide us into work we did not dream we could do. But, as my theme will be throughout this paper, I feel that you, the Social Workers, and we, the people, must work simultaneously to motivate legislation for State funds.

Miss Laabs was then president of the N. A. S. S. W. which had at that time only professional members. She was also, as now, in charge of the School Social Work program in Minneapolis—a full time job. This was in the early years of the war when great public interest was aroused to do a preventive delinquency job for children, and many cities in the country were finally becoming aware of the importance of this program in their schools.

Miss Laabs did a superb job of selling and promoting School Social Work to me. She talked for hours about the desperate pleas coming in from other states, some of which raised money through their legislatures to set up School Social Work programs. But how to do it? Where to get the personnel? What kind of training should they have? What were the duties of Visiting Teachers in the school system? How could they become an integral part of the school, working with the classroom teacher to help her with difficult children—not having the teacher antagonistic but having her work with them. More and more demands for Miss Laabs to come to give seminars, to teach, to talk, to show them. Some cities did not yet have the appropriations, had not sold the service to their Boards of Education or to their communities. Would she come and talk to them, explain the system? Would Miss Laabs send them printed matter? To what office did they write for printed matter? Where could they get all the information they needed?

Then Miss Laabs talked to me in detail about case histories, getting down to the tragic individual child, stirring my maternal instincts; telling how children with problems could be made into better citizens if they were reached early enough in school with understanding and intelligence by the School Social Worker. Little Johnnie being turned from a belligerent and disturbed little boy into a fairly good student and citizen. I was most impressed by the fact that School Social Workers were the only professional group who were in a position to reach every child in the community who attended public schools, and were also the only group who were able to reach all children at kindergarten age. This to my mind was the great difference between the scope of work of School Social Work-

ers and private and public agency workers. The agencies are rarely able to reach children until their home problem becomes a family case, and therefore they miss potentially disturbed children.

By this time I wanted to dedicate my life to helping establish School Social Work programs in every city in the United States.

But we must have an Executive Office, said Miss Laabs. We must employ an Executive Secretary. We must have a clearing house for all communications and information. We must have field workers. We must have lay people—and most of all, we must have money. We have to spread this service throughout the country. And so we started.

My first idea was to get a group of interested and intelligent members of our community to work with me. And that is where I ran up against the ignorance of the general public about School Social Work. I am sure I did not sell it as well as Miss Laabs had to me. The war was on and most of my friends were in Red Cross uniforms and working hard in that capacity. But we went ahead—Miss Laabs and Mrs. Richard Gale, my first convert and a prominent citizen of Minneapolis. For four long years we worked and struggled to form the Executive Office which is now, as you know, in New York City—and which is also, as you probably know, in dire financial difficulty.

Our initial money was raised through foundations which were interested only after long and strenuous discussions and constant personal interviews—and this was also the approach with a few socially-minded lay people to whom we could sell our project. I would like to mention all the kind and wonderful people who worked with us during this period, including Mrs. Louis Weiss, now a Board Member of the National Association of School Social Workers, without whose help we never could have accomplished what we did. But it would take too much of your time, and I must get on to the uninformed public.

Now, to go back: What are the questions asked by lay people about School Social Work?

1. Why can't the teachers in the school be trained and educated to take the place of the School Social Worker?
2. What is the difference between a School Social Worker and an attendance counselor or truant officer?
3. Isn't there a great deal of overlapping with other agencies, such as private and public welfare agencies?

4. What are the mental hygiene groups doing? Don't they take care of children? What are the child guidance clinics for? Isn't that the same idea? We hear and read so much of all these organizations in magazines and newspaper articles. Why do we never hear or read of School Social Workers?

5. How do the parents of children feel who are interviewed by a School Social Worker? Do you believe in all this psychiatric approach? It seems that everything is excused, all faults are forgiven. Is the child always right and the teacher always wrong? Isn't there too much explaining of a child's faults and not enough constructive action to cure them?

Some of these questions come from mothers whose children are in public schools but who have never heard of a School Social Worker because their children have never happened to be a "problem."

Many of these questions can be answered very simply and are understood the minute that they have been explained. But there are two I would like to enlarge upon, as I feel they are justified criticisms which the School Social Worker must answer herself:

(1) The overlapping of other agencies: At the time I was working with Miss Laabs I was also a member of a board of a private agency, and I found that there were a great many criticisms of the two professional groups for each other. The private agency claimed that the School Social Worker did not always use discretion in turning a school case over to family agencies, and this naturally involved all the lay people who sat on the board of this agency and aroused many criticisms concerning the place of the School Social Worker. I am mentioning this because all this type of thing forms the opinion of the general public.

(2) How can your organization educate the community through publications? Why haven't there been more articles in popular women's magazines about the work of a School Social Worker? I read many of your case histories in your Bulletin. Can't they be written for the general public? —not from the professional approach but from a public relations approach, as in mental hygiene, child psychiatry, and infant care which has been used to enlighten the public on all these subjects. What the public would also like to know, after having all these different symptoms explained about the disturbed child, is what can actually be done about them and what constructive means can be used to improve this child's problem. This is something that some of the articles in psychiatry and mental hygiene have not yet answered. I feel there is a reaction growing

in the community: "All right, now we know why our child behaves this way, but what can we constructively do about it?"

What can the School Social Work program do so that every mother who has a child in the school system could know about your services? Why can't you promote your service in all P. T. A. meetings, at kindergarten rallies. Why can't it be one of the projects of your organization to interest all the new mothers whose children have just entered kindergarten?

Two years ago our Governor, Luther Youngdahl, organized his first "Conference on Youth." Mrs. Stuart Wells and I of N. A. S. S. W. were appointed by the Governor to a Pre-Conference Panel for Education. We helped select the panel on Education and were able to procure the then Associate Superintendent of Schools in Minneapolis to take the Chair. He, Mrs. Wells and I learned a great deal about what the community wanted and needed during the conference. As a result of the panel on Education, we succeeded in having the first recommendation for legislation to raise funds for School Social Workers throughout the State of Minnesota. We got great interest and response from the whole panel including the superintendents of rural school systems. Many of these rural educators knew very little about School Social Workers, and it was only at the end of the panel and, after long discussions on the work you do, that the educators in these small towns became not only interested but enthusiastic. The result was that we were able to get a resolution passed with their full support. But again our feeling was that your program had not been publicized enough through the State and with the school superintendents themselves to have the demand come from them.

Mrs. Wells attended the Minnesota Congress of P. T. A. Her attendance was suggested to us by the local Mental Hygiene Society. Again we were able to get a resolution passed for the same legislation with the support of the P. T. A.

After the results of the Governor's Youth Conference and the Minnesota Congress of P. T. A., Mrs. Wells and I felt our next step, in our desire to promote legislation, was to have a personal interview with our Governor. In arranging this appointment we had an interview with a Minneapolis judge who is in charge of a court for delinquent youth. We also talked with a woman lobbyist. Both, we found, were enthusiastic about our program. I am mentioning the judge and the lobbyist because I think you will always find exceptional individuals interested in a progressive program such as yours, even though it is not widely known

through the City. But there is that great gap between the exceptional individuals on one side and the School Social Workers themselves on the other. And this is the great uninformed public which must be reached in some way to be able to promote the program to be really effective throughout the country. To be specific, this group includes such people as Taxpayers' Associations, the A. A. U. W., Farm Bureau and Auxiliary and many others.

The Governor was in general agreement with everything we proposed. Legislation was needed and he would help, but he emphasized what we all know—that with many good causes calling for money and legislation, strong public demand is necessary for any one of them.

I mentioned earlier the lack of articles in newspapers, and again I feel there is a need for informing and giving the newspapers specific articles to publish. Our experience was this: After the Minnesota Congress of P. T. A., Mrs. Wells personally interviewed an editor of our local newspaper and told him that she had attended the Congress and that a resolution for School Social Workers to promote legislation to subsidize these programs through the State had been passed. She asked him if he would be interested in writing an article for the local newspaper. To our great satisfaction an editorial appeared the next day which was greatly in our favor, and asked the citizens to promote School Social Workers and explained the need for them.

The second Governor's Youth Conference has just been held, and Mrs. Wells and I were not so fortunate as we were two years ago. We were not invited to be on the panel for Education, but, uninvited, we attended the pre-conference on this panel and urged our program as one of the first considerations of Education. We were only partially successful as each group was pressing for his particular interest, and there was great emphasis this year on physical education. As for School Social Work there was a great question of whether the teachers themselves couldn't be given in-service training to handle problem children.

To sum up: We interested people of the community realize that you School Social Workers have a certain hesitancy about promoting your own service and that there is a real reason for that hesitancy because you have been accused of being a special interest group with an ax to grind. Most social workers are reluctant to interpret and explain to the public what they do, possibly because your work is related to individual cases and is of a highly confidential nature. To quote Louis Towley in his article on "Why Social Legislation is Disliked"—"How can the legislation we

espouse be accepted unless we find a sense of common purpose and feeling with the public we serve?" We realize that you should not have to plead your own cause alone before the public but in cooperation with us. We have analyzed our Minnesota situation and have reached some conclusions about possible procedures. They may be valuable to others as a guide to an approach. Other states may find that some of the organizations listed may not be helpful to them, or that organizations not mentioned would be helpful. Each state and each locality will have to adapt these suggestions to its own situation.

Educators in General: We should not expect too much help from them. Most of them are so busy trying to balance their budgets to support existing services that they just can't face extra burdens of additional financing which will be necessary if the service is added. But, as I have said, we will find individual educators who see the need and will give you all the help they can.

Constructively, I believe we must approach the question in two ways. On the one side we must try to educate the opposition. On the other side we will need to enlist organization support among lay groups.

Taxpayers' Associations: Much of the opposition stems from the attitude of this group. There is a real job to be done in reaching the people who support these associations. Normally they are inclined to take the short-sighted course of objecting to any services that cost money. A long program of continuous education is badly needed in order to try to convince them that from the long-range view money spent in this way is a sound investment, that it will serve to prevent delinquency with the resultant high costs of corrective and punitive institutions. They are a hard nut to crack, but I am convinced that failure to educate them in the past has been a costly omission in all educational advancements.

Organizational Support: In order to get legislation passed, I think we must get organizational support. With a few organizations back of us, we are then in a stronger position to approach the Department of Education. They are with us in principle, but they need evidence of popular demand in order to feel justified in pushing a new project. We might expect eventually to have legislation come in as a recommendation of the Department, but only after lay support has been broad enough to justify it and there is a widespread conviction that it is sound preventive work which will save money in the end.

American Association of University Women: In our State they are already interested and will probably put it on their State pro-

gram at the State Convention in April. They stress the educational techniques, not pressure on legislators, and they have a lot of valuable experience in working with the legislature. They can take excellent leadership in their respective communities.

Minnesota Congress of Parents and Teachers: School Social Work is the type of thing they should welcome. They have the strength of numbers and understand the need of your program. I feel they can steer and help us in working with the P. T. A.

Farm Bureau and Auxiliary: As Minnesota is an agricultural state, the Farm Bureau and Auxiliary are very powerful. They have been active workers for the reorganization of school districts. Perhaps this situation exists in other states.

Federation of Women's Clubs: They represent numbers, and they should be reached but I have no idea what their response would be.

The American Legion and Auxiliary: They too have the power of numbers and organization. I don't know whether they would be interested but the approach might be through building for citizenship.

Liberal Political Leaders: They should be approached, and if possible we should get bipartisan support so as to prevent its becoming a party issue.

Religious Groups: They are generally enthusiastic about the need of this type of work, especially the Jewish groups.

Added all together, this is an extensive and somewhat frightening program. We certainly haven't done all of this yet in Minnesota, and it may seem presumptuous to advise others. All this takes time and work. Unfortunately there is no short cut. Any project that requires taxes and public support must have a group larger than its professional personnel vitally interested in promoting it. There is no substitute here either—and I know you will guide us and inspire us on to bigger and broader efforts in this fine cause.

INTERPRETATION OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK TO OTHER SCHOOL PERSONNEL*

OPAL BOSTON, State Consultant, Visiting Counselor
Program, State of Illinois

Social work, like any other service to persons needing help, must be understood. It must be understood by those who will make use of it for themselves. Also, it must be understood by those who, such as the doctor or teacher, will be closely involved with the person being served as well as being involved with the social worker who is rendering the service. This is especially true when social casework is made available within a setting not primarily organized to give this special service, such as in the hospital or clinic where medical service is the primary function, or in the school where the primary function is to provide an educational opportunity for all children. In these types of settings the casework function is secondary. That is, the social casework *supplements* the efforts of the teacher in the teaching of the child or of the medical staff in the healing of the sick. This secondary service is frequently not defined in specific terms, in the over-all philosophy and function of the agency. The social worker must take the responsibility for helping other professional persons whose service she is supplementing, to understand what this help can mean, not only directly to the patient or school child, but also, what it can mean to the service they, of the other profession, are giving and how both work together toward a common goal.

The school will need to gain understanding of the social worker who, as another skilled professional member of the staff with a special competence, can help the teacher in her efforts to teach the child. She does this by offering a service for certain individual children that is different from that offered by any other person in the school, and yet a service that is an integral part of the total program. Not only must she interpret the specific place social work has in the school, but she must be able to define social work in its broader professional role. It is important that the school personnel be able to see the school's place in relation to the private and public child welfare and family agencies, psychiatric clinics, and other agencies in the community. I have often heard school personnel indicate that they are willing to use the social worker on the school staff but do not want social workers from the "outside" to come in or to work with

* Paper delivered at the National Conference of Social Work, Atlantic City, April, 1950.

the child away from the school. They frequently think of the school social worker as one kind of a professional person, and others as different personnel whom they may refer to as "investigators", or relief workers on whom a distasteful stigma has been attached. This may be due in part to an outmoded or erroneous concept of social work or of welfare services, and in part to mistakes made by our own profession. I shall not discuss the reasons for this but I stress the importance of helping this other professional group, the educators, to gain respect for and confidence in the whole profession of which we school social workers are a part. Other members of our own profession likewise need to understand and gain respect for what the educational group has to offer to the social worker and her professional job. I have known a good caseworker who failed to take advantage of the help she might have gained in her service to a child by failing to work with the teacher who knows that child in his relationships in the group and to other individual children for such a great part of his day. The team relationship between social worker and educator should operate whether the casework service is given within or outside the school setting.

Interpretation of social work has been one of the major concerns of the profession both in the professional schools and to the practitioners in the field. All must assume a share of responsibility in this although some may have more formal responsibility for it than others. We who have been working in the public schools have been acutely aware of the need for a sound approach to this problem in relation to other school personnel.

"Other school personnel" includes all persons having responsibility for the child in school; that is, administrators, teachers, nurses, supervisors, psychologists, and others. Even the janitor is occasionally the one who will refer the child for help. He may also be the one to misinterpret it to the child who is using it at one time or another.

First of all, if we are to have a sound, well-integrated social casework service in the schools, for the benefit of the individual child who needs it, we must help the *administrators* to know what this service is and how it fits into the total school program. The superintendent may delegate the administration of the service to another person but he needs a clear understanding of it himself. He must see how it helps the other members of the staff, especially the teachers, to carry out their responsibility to the child more effectively and efficiently. The superintendent must be able to accept this service as vital to the over-all purpose of the school.

It will be the superintendent's responsibility in most instances to interpret the service to the members of the Board of Education who are

the persons in the community taking responsibility for the public in seeing that *all* children are truly given the opportunity to be educated. These are the persons who will be most critical, and rightfully so, for it is their children who are to be educated. Also, they, and those whom they represent in the community, are the ones who "pay the bill." The superintendent will be called upon to defend this item in the budget when there may be many other real needs that are already felt and understood. State superintendents of schools and legislators will frequently depend upon this administrator from the local district to interpret the schools' needs and program. He must have good knowledge and understanding of this service if he is to adequately meet these demands made upon him.

Also, the administrator is the person to whom the rest of the school staff turns for leadership in the development and the use of special services.

The *principal* is another key person in the administration of this special service. He is the one in a particular building who is responsible for the development of the total program for the children enrolled there. The social worker is responsible to the principal for any work carried on in that building regardless of others to whom she is responsible in the over-all program. It is only as the principal wants this service as a part of the school program that it can successfully be utilized by other school personnel and by children. If he has a clear understanding of it, he will be better able to take the leadership in its development as a part of his building program.

Curriculum planning, as developed by supervisors, directors of special education, and other administrative persons, may be influenced by the understanding which the social worker brings as a result of her knowledge of the way individual children have been able, or unable, to use the educational program that is in the school for them. If the skills of the social worker are understood and the services she renders accepted, she will be able to make a contribution either by being a part of, or a consultant to, committees planning curriculum or other parts of the school program. This can happen only if the persons responsible for the planning understand what this social worker may know about children and their difficulties in learning that can be helpful to the educator, and also, if the social worker understands the purpose and philosophy of the planning group. Where there is a mutual sharing of responsibility with others within the group, we find developing a deeper understanding of each other's particular professional competence.

The *teacher,* of course, is the most important person in the school to the child and the teacher-child relationship is the most important factor

in the child's school life. The effectiveness of the interpretation to the teacher of social casework service will, more than anything else, directly influence the entire casework program in the school. The teacher is the one on whom rests the real decision as to whether or not the child will have this service, and she is the person who is best able to help the child to make constructive use of it.

All social workers, visiting counselors, visiting teachers or whatever they may be called, who are a part of a school faculty are aware of these things which I have mentioned. The problem we face is how we can interpret the social work profession and the place of social casework within the school to other school personnel. Certainly this must be done if social casework is to be used appropriately in the school. Some of our particular skills as social workers should help us in this task.

First of all, in this job of interpretation, we must understand the philosophy and purpose of the educational system in which we work. We must have real conviction that the school experience is good for *all* children and that a satisfying, successful use of the school is the right of every child. Also, we must be aware of our own attitudes about school and school personnel and understand how these affect our relationships within the school. It is true that, because of the nature of our professional training and through development of a professional self, we achieve a great degree of self awareness and professional discipline. However, when we work in a particular setting such as the school, we must be certain to examine our own early relationships within the school, our feelings about authority and how these affect our professional relationship with teachers and other school personnel and how they may affect the child we serve.

Secondly, in order to do a good interpretive job, we must have real conviction that the school personnel is as concerned as we are that the school meet as adequately as possible the individual needs of the child. That this is true is evidenced in the trend in the training programs in schools of education and in the increasing focus in legislation for the education of the "exceptional child" as well as for the normal child.

Even if we have these convictions, the task is not easy but I think that it is clear—it is to work together on a close cooperative and continuing basis with the other school personnel to bring about a clearer understanding that this specialized service is one that must be a part of the total school program and that it has a particular contribution to make. There is no one way to do this job of interpretation. We often hear it said that we "sell" our services best by *doing* a good job. This is only

partially true although it is a very necessary way of making a contribution to an understanding of social work. We must *do* it. We must *discuss* it. We must *tell* it. Greater understanding does not come automatically or spontaneously although this may sometimes seem to be the case. Constant awareness of the current attitudes and degree of understanding of the program on the part of school staff members is necessary.

Our actual casework practice is important in interpreting our service. We must *do* a good job if the other school personnel is to gain respect and confidence in the part we have to offer in the educational program. It is important that we sometimes consciously use our casework practice as an interpretive tool. A particular problem which one child has may be one in which you make a special effort to engage a certain teacher to actively work with you because it involves an area in which she lacks an awareness of how a social worker may be of help to the child and to her in her own particular job with that child. It may be through this experience or several other similar ones that she begins to see the value of this casework service as not only helping the child with a specific problem at a certain time, but in addition the teacher may see it as helping the child to use that which she has to give him and benefit thereby in his total learning experience in school.

When she understands that social casework service supplements her work with the child rather than denies or replaces it, she may want to use it more. We recognize with her that the help she as a teacher can give any child as an individual will necessarily be limited to her responsibility to the needs of all children in the classroom group.

As the teacher comes to understand from the caseworker Mary's aggressive hostile behavior in the light of some of this particular child's early deprivations or earlier and current relationships in the family and in the community, she may no longer feel defensive in asking for help. She may then seek assistance with Johnny who has problems also.

Likewise, as another child's mother begins to work with the teacher after the social worker has helped her to a better understanding of the school in relation to her child, the teacher may recognize more clearly the contribution of the social worker in working with parents of children having difficulty in school.

In all referrals the worker will continually contribute to the teacher's understanding of the caseworker's role in the school through a close cooperative working relationship with her with regard to individual children.

Another important phase of interpretation occurs in group discussions of social work with other school personnel. These discussions may be formal or informal; specific or general. Whichever they may be, they should always be thoughtful and professional in content. The formal group discussions of specific cases provide an especially good opportunity to enable the individuals in the group to understand what the particular contribution of the school social worker is and how it is related to the goal which the school has set for the child. It will give an opportunity for others to see how the caseworker's focus on the individual child differs from the teacher's, the dean's, or others' work with the child on an individual basis.

Formal groups may have discussions directed towards an evaluation of an over-all program of social work in the school or any part of it. In this the members of the school staff should have information about the evaluation process and, if possible, be given some preliminary material to use as guides in their thinking. This may consist of merely a list of questions or may be a more detailed report of the study of the program. This type of activity will encourage each member of the group to look critically at his own use of the service and determine how the service has helped or failed the child who is indicating in his behavior in school some social and emotional difficulties.

Especially helpful in interpretation will be those group discussions which will be planned around the particular contribution of different personnel in the school. This is not an uncommon practice and may occur in a particular building, in a school district, or a part of a conference or meeting of a wider group of educators. These discussion groups should not be vague in regard to the description of casework. It is true that ours is a difficult profession to define without the danger of going into vague generalities. However as schools of social work have been able to help us to develop greater skill, and as our experience broadens and deepens, we can speak with more confidence of our ability to help as well as with greater conviction within ourselves about this service we give. We need no longer be so fearful of giving more specific interpretation. We can say with conviction those things that we do know and admit more comfortably those things that we do not know or which we cannot help.

The informal discussions can be very valuable and should not be lightly considered. These contacts may occur in the teachers' lounge, in groups before faculty meeting, or before school begins. At all times the social worker should be aware of the importance of the way she talks about the social work profession and the meaning the discussion may have

for the persons participating. In these discussions she may have the best opportunity to know what her co-workers in education want or expect from this specialized service, how they understand it, and how they are making use of it for the child. Here also we may find a particular teacher most ready to gain some understanding of what social casework is and to get the feeling of the caseworker's relationship with the teacher and others in the school. Occasionally I hear a caseworker say that she "always tries not to get too friendly with the teacher". The worker usually means by this that she is afraid of losing her professional relationship with the teacher. If she has convictions about the profession of social work and has security through her belief and skill in casework, she need not have concern for dangers she has formerly felt in her personal relationships with her co-workers. The important thing is to give the same conscientious thoughtful consideration to what we say about our job in these informal discussions and in our personal relationships as when we talk about it at any other time.

Another approach to interpretation different from the formal group discussions mentioned above is that which we might describe as "telling" someone or some group what we do. Perhaps this is most frequently done, or at least most important to do, with the superintendent or other administrative persons who are not at any time, or infrequently at least, making direct use of this service in relation to the child himself. It may also be used at faculty meetings. In this kind of interpretation we must be careful to give a true picture of the purpose of the service and of the skills we possess. Limitations must be frankly admitted. We will need to guard against giving the impression that we believe that social casework is a panacea for solving all the difficulties that children may be having in making use of the school to the maximum of their capacity. Some children with more serious behavior problems cannot be helped by casework alone, and psychiatric treatment or institutional placement may be necessary. Services of a child placing or family agency may be indicated and used before a particular child can make an adequate social or academic adjustment in school.

On the other hand the school social worker must not give the impression of her job as being primarily a referral service, but rather, that she uses her casework skills in working with individual children and their families when there is evidence in the child's *behavior in school* of some social and emotional difficulties.

In this interpretive process it is extremely important that the social worker begin with the other school person *where he is.* Do not assume

that the educator knows nothing about the kind of service the social worker has to offer. Learn what each one does understand about the profession as well as what his attitudes are about children who do not get along, about special services in the school, and about individual help for children. If you encourage the superintendent to tell you about his school, his philosophy and plans for it, you will know fairly well "where he is," and the tone and content of your interpretation of social work will be guided by this.

Social workers sometimes have an opportunity to interpret the profession to school personnel through channels other than those within the school. These opportunities can be especially significant to the over-all development of social work in schools. I have known two instances when school administrators sat down together with school social workers and members of faculties of professional schools of social work in an effort to try to determine how the schools of social work and public school personnel could work together on problems of recruitment of qualified personnel, development of practice, in-service training, and development of standards.

As we think of interpretation of social work in its broader aspect in relation to public schools, there are two other areas that social workers can take some responsibility for in addition to that of helping to bring about a closer relationship between schools of social work and educators. These are: a closer relationship between professional schools of social work and schools of education, and more opportunity for teachers in training and social workers in training to experience what each other has to contribute to the development of the whole child. There are trends in this direction in certain parts of the country which have been stimulated by the tremendous amount of work that has been done in both fields by the National Association of School Social Workers.

It seems to me that social workers are developing their skills in interpretation in all of these areas although, to be sure, there is still much to do to insure continued progress toward a better understanding of the use of social casework in the schools. More school social workers should recognize that this is their responsibility. The schools are asking for help in understanding the job of the social worker. Several years ago a school administrator wandered into a meeting at which a paper was being read about social work in a school setting. The paper described the service social work makes available to the individual child and his family when difficulties in school develop and emphasized the important contribution

that this type of service makes to the preventive mental hygiene aspect of the school program. This administrator said to himself, "That is what we have wanted for the school child but we did not know what to call it or to what professional discipline to go for help in developing it." I believe that we shall find as we go about this job of interpretation that many of the school personnel will want this kind of service and will also seek our help in clearly defining the philosophy and function of school social work as well as help in ways of making it an integral part of the total school program for the benefit of the child.

A PLAN FOR THE PREVENTION OF READING DIFFICULTIES

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A great deal of blame has been placed on the schools for the frustrations of the pupils in their charge. Rightly or wrongly, some of the charge must be accepted. Of all of the frustrating factors of the school, the emphasis placed on learning to read is perhaps the greatest single one.

Reading is a paramount issue in the schools. Why is this a fact? Colleges complain because high school graduates coming to them are unable to read. Business men, receiving the products of the common schools in their field, find them unable to absorb the sales bulletins or other printed instructions that are a part of the position or job. Many of these same business men feel that they themselves cannot read with the facility that they should.

The schools have been deeply concerned about the implications of this problem. Children need to learn to read in order to succeed in school and in their later careers. Their inability to read with their peers is the beginning of a frustrating experience which builds as the school career continues. Inability to read prevents good work in the other school subjects and thus the disturbance grows.

The concern of the schools in many instances has seemed almost futile. Large classes and poorly trained teachers have come in for some well-deserved blame. But, is this the entire answer? The one point of agreement on the problem has been that this lack of ability to read is probably due to many causes.

In the past the schools of Renton, Washington, have received their deserved share of blame. Large remedial classes, concern about frequent failures, etc., indicated a recognition of the problem and some attempts to solve it but with little success.

In 1944 a study was made to try to determine where some help might be given the reading part of the educational program, help that would be based on research findings and tested principles. One hundred cases of remedial or grade retarded pupils from grades five through seven were selected on the basis of need. No selection was made as to mental ability ratings or any other achievement marking than in reading. They were

selected from the remedial classes or from the lists of those who had failed their grade because of reading disability. The records of these pupils were traced back to the time of their starting their first year in school.

As the study progressed it was interesting to note that in a large number of cases the disability did not show up until the latter half of the third grade or might not have become a serious handicap until the fourth or fifth grades. However, in 92% of the cases examined, reading readiness tests given as these children were starting their first year of school had shown that they were not ready for the reading program. In spite of this indication they had been started anyway. Could it be that the school had erred in not heeding the signs? Should the reading program of these pupils have been delayed until they were ready?

A review of the literature on the teaching of reading showed that most of the experts agreed that a child should not be started in reading until he had a mental age of about six and one-half years, or six-six in the terminology of the classroom. This review also indicated that the type of reading difficulties we were encountering were most often attributable to the too early beginning of the formal reading activity. Our schools had been admitting pupils of a chronological age of five years and nine months to first grade since the system had no kindergartens at that time.

As in most cases, it was one thing to diagnose the disease; it was quite another matter to work out a cure. There was the tradition of the "entering school" age. There was a state law that permitted a six-year-old to come to school. There was the tradition that the study of reading was begun at school entrance. A solution was desperately needed. This is what we did.

Consultation with such experts as were available in our state led us to believe that at least part of the solution we were looking for was with the Junior Primary type of organization. It was recommended that we place in this class all of those pupils who were immature in any or all of the four phases of development; namely, physical, social, intellectual or mental. The physical is, of course, self-explanatory. Naturally a child who is physically immature will be more subject to disease, less able to carry the load of the heaviest grade in school, the first. Placing a child in school while still physically immature may so damage his health and slow up his development as to cause future trouble that will affect his well-being for the rest of his life. We do not know the harm we may have done thousands of children in the past through placing upon them requirements that they were not able to meet.

To be socially mature the pupil must be ready to take his place with others of his age in a social situation. He should show tendencies to lead as well as to follow. He should approach problems with the aggressiveness of a six-year-old and not the temerity of a five. It has been interesting to note in dealing with the children in this experiment, that when left to themselves, the children gravitate toward a group made up of their intellectual levels rather than toward age level groups.

To be intellectually ready for reading, a child should have had experimental experience which gives him an idea background and a vocabulary based upon actual experience. This gives him a fund of information upon which he may draw in interpreting what he may read.

Mental maturity is more or less readily measurable by means of standardized tests. To be sure, at this level some error creeps into test results. By rechecking group-test results with individual testing and a trained tester, these errors are kept at a minimum. The degree of immaturity in any of these phases would be a determining factor in deciding what amount of extra-readiness training would be necessary for a particular child before using the printed page.

As early as 1933 our schools had experimented with a type of Junior Primary program which had been discarded as unworkable. The reasons for this lay in having these classes taught by a first-grade teacher as an extra section in a regular first-grade room. The problem of administering the program and the pressure from parents caused these youngsters to be promoted to the second grade which had not been prepared to receive them. Thus the system was worse for them than the traditional one. We talked a good Junior Primary program, but in practice we taught as we had done before.

In the Spring of 1945 it was decided that for the fall term certain rooms would be set apart as Junior Primary rooms. Pupils would be placed in these rooms and the program adapted to their individual needs. The teacher would be made to understand that learning to read was only incidental to the background learnings and experiences until such time as the pupil showed himself ready for the reading program. When that time came, he was to be placed in one of the reading first grades, or if those grades had advanced so far that this would handicap him or them, he was to be given reading instruction at the time and at the speed he could take it in the Junior Primary room. Pupils were to be placed in these classes on the basis of reading-readiness-tests and teacher-observation during the first month of school. Costs were to be defrayed by using regular first

grade classrooms and teachers. Assignment to the Junior Primary classes, so depleting the regular classes, would make these teachers available.

An "atomic bomb" exploded just before school started that year and all plans went awry. However, on the basis of teacher recommendation and testing, pupils were assigned to three Junior Primary sections by the first of December. The testing for this year was done with the Stanford-Binet revision.

The first grade teachers were very surprised at the changes in load that these withdrawals made in their rooms. They felt that they were now able to give to the remaining children much of the material they had not had time for in the past. The reaction of the Junior Primary youngsters was best expressed by one of the teachers who said, "These little duffers are really happy for the first time since they started to school. Now they are not on the bottom competing against a group that are all better than they. Now their pictures are chosen for display. Now they get a chance to take the milk money to the office and run other errands. What has happened to them is wonderful."

Of course, there was and is a need for parent education in the process. Some parents refused to have anything to do with the program. When this happened, the children were left in the first grade rooms and in most instances had to repeat the grade the next year.

The first year's experience made it evident that some means was needed to select the groups before they were assigned to sections. Waiting until the second month of school necessitated readjustment for the group of pupils least capable of making those adjustments. One of the greatest obstacles, from the parent's standpoint, had been the severance of the pupil-teacher relationship with that all important "first teacher" of the pupil. With permission of the School Board it was decided to try an experiment in pre-determining, through tests, those pupils who should be placed in each of the two types of beginning classes. This was tried first on a voluntary basis.

With the aid of the King County Health Department, clinics for these examinations were set up. The examinations consisted of a standardized Reading Readiness test, an eye check for maturity with the Keystone telebinocular, a test by means of the Snellan Chart, a pure-tone audiometer hearing test and a health examination by the doctors from the health department. A preliminary report of some of the startling findings in the health examination caused the School Board to rule that the check should be mandatory by either the child's own doctor or by the Health

Department doctor. In either case, all children entering the first year of school must submit to the other examinations at the clinics. Pupils singled out for Junior Primary were rechecked by means of the Stanford-Binet tests. This served two purposes; it gave the Research Director a chance to double check the findings of his staff, and it gave added proof of the need for extra help for these pupils. This aided in convincing the parents of the value of the program for their children.

Teachers were warned that the placements might be incorrect or that the needs of the children might change. They were asked to recommend a change of the pupil in every case where misplacements seemed apparent. These amounted to less than 2% of the number of Junior Primary placements.

The first year of these summer examinations, 1946, the staff was moved from building to building in the school district in order to make it more convenient for parents and children. Approximately two hundred of four hundred and fifty were examined before school started. The others were examined during the first two weeks of school. Again three of the Readiness classes were needed to accommodate the Junior Primary level.

The first year there was a great deal of "selling" to be done to the parents. As with any new idea, they were opposed on the grounds that it was not done elsewhere. Starting at that time, and continuing through each succeeding year, there have been talks to the pre-school groups, speeches to service clubs, and programs before P. T. A. groups. It has been pointed out that the plan is for the good of all of the children, both those in the Junior Primary and those in the first grade who receive the benefit of the added teacher-time saved from having to entertain the immature children. Each year several of the parents have demurred. Where they could not be persuaded, the child was put into the first grade with a request that the teacher be careful not to push him before he was ready. Frequent requests have been made to the teachers for reports of the children placed in first grade. In four out of five cases, the findings in the clinic have been upheld by later teacher reports.

There has been a very vocal group in the community who have objected to the Junior Primary idea. Interestingly enough, very few of the objectors have had the experience of having a child in the Junior Primary. In most instances, those parents who have had enough interest to follow the requests of the school and visit both the first grade and the Junior Primary rooms have come away convinced that the school is actually try-

ing to fill the needs of the child. On the other hand, we have some parents who ask that their children be placed in the Junior Primary classes to receive the added advantage of the extra training. Unfortunately we have been unable to accede to these due to a lack of space.

As a check on the plan which we have been operating, a survey was made in the spring of 1949. The following findings were noted:

(1) By holding in the Junior Primary during the first year those children who would otherwise have been retained later, retentions have been reduced in grades one, two, three, and four. (2) Under the old system, children, who are now put in Junior Primary classes, continue to be failures in the higher grades partially due to the imprint of failure during the first year. It was found, under the old system, that most of these children tended to stay in the lower third of their classes even after retention. Under the new Junior Primary system we find, in this survey made of grades one, two and three, that one-third of the children who had been in Junior Primary are now in the highest groups of their classes, one-third doing average work, while the remaining third find the work of the grade in which they are placed too hard for them. We have thus prevented two-thirds of the former failures that existed under the old system. Our pupil casualties have thus changed from one-third to something between 6% and 8% of the total number of first grade entrants. True, in most instances Junior Primary has meant an added year for the pupil, but the majority have experienced success at their level by not being in competition with the pupils who were ready, when they were not. This success has fostered later success in school just as "failing" under the old system seemed to result in later failure.

CONCLUSIONS

The Junior Primary classes, coupled with selective pre-school clinics, can work to the advantage of most of the children entering the school. They withhold from the reading situation those who are not yet mature enough to make the needed adjustments for reading. Perhaps the same end might be accomplished by holding smaller classes and insisting that the teachers teach individuals rather than classes. On the other hand, these pupils who are immature usually find their social level by the delay of a year, rather than by being forced into the bottom strata of their chronological age group. They are not in a room competing with children who are so much superior that they can identify their inferiority. The standard first grades are more homogenous and profit from more of the teacher's time. This makes for more rapid advancement through greater

individual effort on their part. The community can be sold on the idea in most instances. Most parents will choose the Junior Primary class when the facts are presented to them provided they have not reached previous conclusions due to "back fence philosophising". Parents whose children have experienced the Junior Primary situation are pleased with the results in most cases.

We agree that the situations presented are not as ideal as we would like them to be. We are still trying to find something better. Until we do, we know that this plan is better than the traditional system.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in a professional organization is a strengthening factor for the individual practicing within that profession. This is as true for the school social worker as it has long been for members of other professions. National Association of School Social Workers has members in 38 states and in Hawaii, Puerto Rico and India.

All members receive the National Association of School Social Workers Bulletin and other materials such as Newsletter, book lists, conference programs, notices, and other publicity. Membership is determined by the training and experience of the applicant.

Applications for membership and a statement of membership requirements may be obtained from the Membership Chairman, Mrs. Helen Roell, Indianapolis Public Schools, 150 N. Meridian Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

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